

UN must protect human rights defenders and ensure accountability for human rights violations

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'Twenty years ago the VDPA set out that the "promotion and protection of human rights is a matter of priority for the international community" and that the realisation of human rights must be "the first responsibility of governments",' said ISHR Director Phil Lynch.

'This session of the Human Rights Council the strength of the international community's action on country situations such as those in Sri Lanka, Syria, North Korea, Mali, Burma and Iran will help determine whether, two decades on, this statement remains rhetoric or becomes reality.'

'The Council must support the UN High Commissioner's call for "an independent and credible international investigation into alleged violations of human rights and humanitarian law" in Sri Lanka.'

According to Mr Lynch, the Human Rights Council will also be called on to take action on a number of thematic priorities identified by the VDPA.

'The VDPA made a crucial contribution to the development of human rights laws and institutions. It affirmed that human rights are universal and highlighted the links between human rights, democracy and development. It also re-affirmed the rights of equality and non-discrimination, and the inalienable rights of women and girls.'

Mr Lynch said that, in accordance with these principles, the Human Rights Council should be careful to ensure that human rights - particularly women's rights and LGBT rights - are not restricted in the name of protecting so-called 'traditional values'.

'The notion of "traditional values" is completely illegitimate so far as it is invoked to restrict the enjoyment of rights guaranteed under international human rights law, or to criminalise or impede activities in defense of them,' said Mr Lynch.

ISHR will also call on the Council to take concrete steps and measures to support non-government organisations and protect human rights defenders from attacks, intimidation and reprisals

'Twenty years ago, the VDPA recognised the "important role of non-governmental organizations in the promotion of all human rights." Two decades on it is imperative that the Council and other UN human rights mechanisms ensure that they are open and accessible to non-government voices. They must also hold states accountable for all forms of harassment and attacks against human rights defenders.'

ISHR's statement to the UN Human Rights Council is available [here](#).

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ISHR